Wolverton's Powerhouse Pepper

The GOLDEN AGE of COMICS

ALEX RAYMOND

Number 5
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COMICS FEATURE

THE MAGAZINE THE PROFESSIONALS READ AND TRUST

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EDITORIAL

This issue of *Golden Age* is an eclectic mixture of styles and types of material ranging from the forceful dramatics of Alex Raymond and his star-spanning Flash Gordon to the sly humor of George Carlson's Pie-Face Prince. Somewhere in between we find time to make stops to view the early work of a young Gene Colan and the incredible antics of Basil Wolverton's Powerhouse Pepper. Raymond Miller continues his overview of the many books released by MLJ and also gives us a glimpse of Strongman, one of the more interesting features of Tem's *Crash Comics*. Also on hand for the celebration of comic books finest hour is a short story reprinted from Street and Smith. The story gives a truely vintage taste of the many heroic wartime characters which occupied comic story-telling during those dangerous years of World War II.

Also of interest to the fan of golden age material is the new series currently seeing print in our sister title, *Comics Feature*. There, for your viewing enjoyment, you will find a new column which goes by the name of "Looking Back at the Golden Age"—a more straightforward tie-in to our type of material has rarely been seen in the pages of the more general magazines about comics, particularly one with such widespread distribution. Ron Goulart, perhaps one of the best writers on popular culture and a longtime fan of the comic book, is the writer of the column. Also of interest, although not necessarily concerning the Golden Age is issue #26 of *Comics Feature* which is entirely devoted to the wonderful work of the late and much missed Russ Manning. Shel Dorf interviewed Manning shortly before his untimely demise and that coupled with numerous follow-up interviews with the many individuals such as Dave Stevens and Bill Stout who worked as his assistants and 30 pages of previously unseen Russ Manning produced Tarzan stories, makes the book one not to be missed.

Upcoming issues of this magazine will contain additional installments of the series on MLJ—which will be followed by looks at other comic book companies—additional installments of the work on Walt Kelly, an interview with Jack Kirby and numerous and sundry other articles and stories aimed at the devotee of fine craftsmanship.

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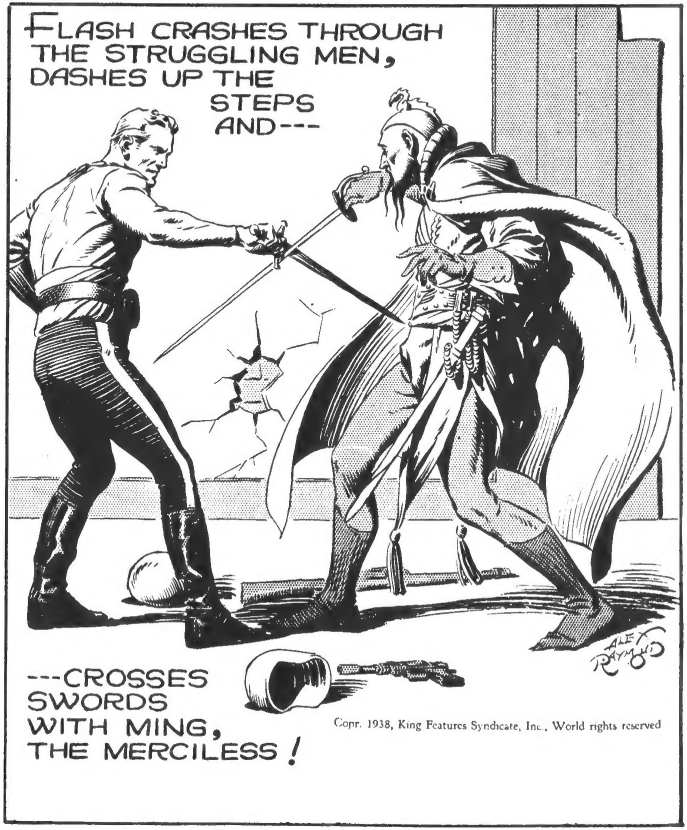

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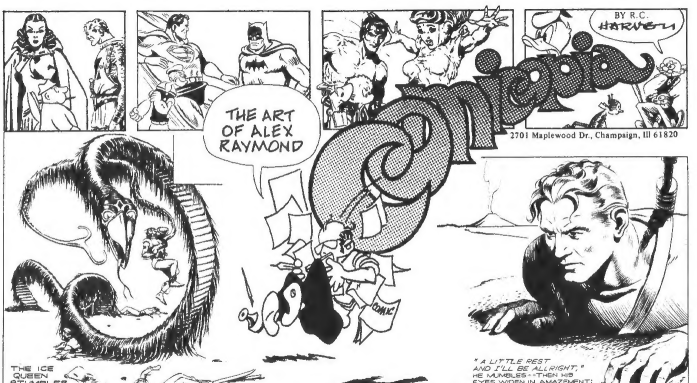


All this hoopla is about a comic strip character. That Flash Gordon, Dale Arden, Ming the Merciless and all the rest have become a part of the American cultural heritage is, in itself, a testament to the power of the medium. Like Sherlock Holmes before him and James Bond afterwards, Flash Gordon leapt from the printed page into the hearts and minds of his readers and eventually assumed palpable shape on the screen. But even before his celluloid incarnation, Flash was already as real to his readers as it is possible for a literary creation to be.

The person chiefly responsible for all this was Alex Raymond, whose consummate artistry stamped the strip, the characters, and the stories with an illusion of reality that was more than convincing; it was spectacular.

Before Raymond gave up drawing *FLASH*, he has established the illustrative manner as one of the two most acceptable modes of rendering a realistic strip: with Hal Foster, Raymond attracted a following and thereby established a "school" whose only effective rival was in the impressionistic techniques of Milton Caniff and Noel Sickles.

Raymond's influence would doubtless have been considerable through the panels of *FLASH* alone, but he multiplied its impact in two other strips.

For a while, three of his strips were appearing at the same time: *FLASH*, *SECRET AGENT X-9*, and *JUNGLE JIM*. Eventually, he abandoned all three and created a fourth strip, *RIP KIRBY*—thereby becoming the first cartoonist to create four immensely successful comic strips. (In this regard, Raymond's only rival is probably Mort Walker.)

Although Raymond is no longer credited with single-handedly creating *FLASH*, it is nonetheless undeniable that it was Raymond's graphics that clothed Don Moore's stories in their most irresistable raiment. As Stephen Becker observes, "What made *FLASH GORDON* outstanding was not the story; along the unmarked trails of interstellar space any continuity was original. Nor were Flash and his lady friend radical departures from the traditional hero and heroine. But *FLASH GORDON* was beautifully drawn."

This is not to deny Moore's contribution. His stories, built archetypally around Flash as god-like redeemer (the savior from another world, as Maurice Horn puts it), were suspenseful, fast-paced, and (Becker notwithstanding) ingenious. Horn is on sound ground when he notes that all the adventures, linked together thematically by Flash's role as redeemer saving a world from evil, lent to the strip some of the quality of an epic poem. But it was the visual impact of *FLASH* that gave the strip its special quality.

"The total effect," Becker says, "—slick, imaginative drawing with literate narrative—was one of melodrama on a high level, which should not obscure the fact that Raymond's villains were thoroughly wicked or that his female characters were generally sexy. *FLASH* rapidly became the premier space strip. It was wittier and moved faster than *BUCK ROGERS*; it was prettier and less boyish than William Rit's and Clarence Gray's *BROCK BRADFORD*."

The graphic style that distinguished *FLASH* did not spring, full-blown, from Raymond's pen on January 7, 1934, when the strip's first installment appeared. As samples of the early *FLASH* (Figure 1) indicate, Raymond's style was at first thoroughly mundane—competent but undistinguished linework of the ordinary outline variety. But before long, Raymond began to feel the influence of other styles of illustration, and the artwork in *FLASH* improved spectacularly.

In using the work of other artists as models for changing his style, Raymond was scarcely unique. Most artists are influenced by what their fellows do, and they borrow freely this technique and that. When the borrowing is well done, however, it goes beyond mere imitation and gives to the borrower's work a new dimension wholly his own. His work becomes an amalgam of all he has borrowed, unified by a single creative consciousness into something uniquely his—his own style.

FIGURE 1 (4/15/34)—Compared to Raymond's later work, the early FLASH Gordon pages were artistically merely competent. Although superior to much comic strip art (BUCK ROGERS included), the simple outlined forms are not different in kind from those to be found in many strips of the period.

It is not clear who influenced Raymond's emerging style the most, although there are several candidates—and Raymond probably borrowed a little from them all (and from some others as yet unknown). In an interview with Shel Dorf in a recent *BUYER'S GUIDE*, Jack Katz claims that Raymond was influenced by turn-of-the-century artist Franklin Booth.

"If you see Franklin Booth's art," Katz says, "you will just fall over backwards. He's got the city in the air exactly the same way Raymond did it. I don't blame Raymond. Booth was fantastic! There's a book on him. In fact, when you see Franklin Booth, you'll say this is Alex Raymond, and I'll say, 'No, this is 1901.'"

In *THE ADVENTUROUS DECADE*, Ron Goulart picks out the influence of the dry brush technique in Raymond's developing style and concludes that Raymond was imitating the styles favored by pulp illustrators. Certainly that influence was felt.

Also among Raymond's models, Goulart says, were Matt Clark and John LaGatta. "From Clark's slick illustrations, he borrowed a good deal, including the prototype for the new improved version of his other hero, Jungle Jim. LaGatta he used for pretty girls."

Goulart spends a great deal of time in his book nudging idols off their pedestals—chiefly by disinterring the ghosts who labored in the shadows, creating reputations and fortunes for cartoonists who (Goulart implies) became famous solely by virtue of their assistants' talents. While the credit that consequently accrues to hitherto unsung artists is long overdue, Goulart's discovery of so many unacknowledged ghosts breeds a cynicism that infects the tone of his prose. The effect is that while crediting the obscure, he discredits the famous in scarcely charitable terms. It is in this spirit that Goulart discusses Raymond's relationship with his assistant, Austin Briggs:

"Another reason for the great leap forward in the drawing of *FLASH* was the hiring of the late Austin Briggs as an assistant. Briggs had been working, in such magazines as *BLUE BOOK*, with a heroic style similar to the one Raymond adopted in the middle thirties. When I interviewed Briggs, he said he thought he'd been associated with the *FLASH* page as early as late 1934 or early 1935. If this is so, a good many of the advances made from that point on are due as much to him as to Raymond."

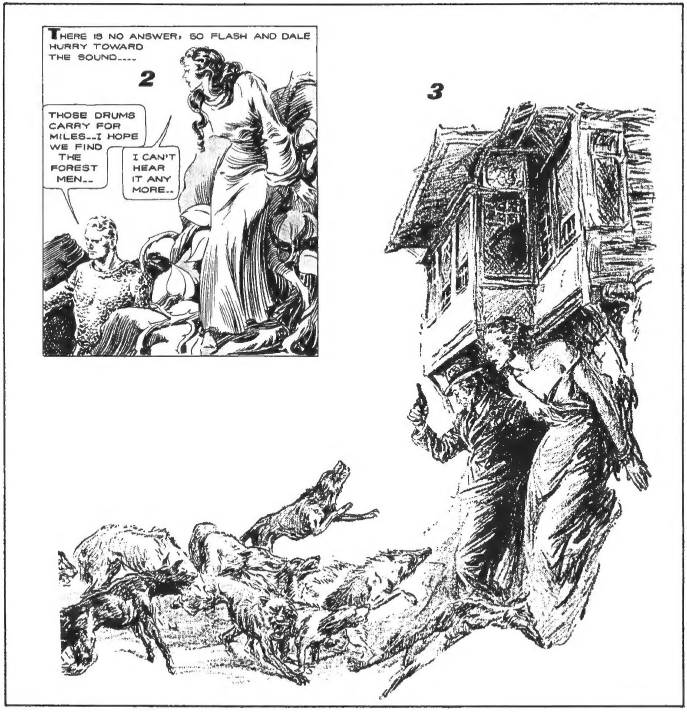
It is Goulart's implications here that most seriously questions what remains of Raymond's reputation now that Moore is credited with writing *FLASH*. I'm not particularly interested in preserving underserved reputations—Raymond's or anyone else's. But I am concerned that the kind of circumstantial evidence we see mustered here can be heaped up in this haphazard way ("*If* this is so...") to suggest that Raymond was little more than a hack with the good luck to have an assistant more talented than he.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the graphic style that so illuminated *FLASH* was not Raymond's but Briggs'. To say that a cartoonist was influenced by numerous other (and often more talented) artists in developing his style is one thing; but to imply that Raymond's reputation as an artist was stolen rather than earned is quite another.

Goulart may be culpable here only in the way he makes his assertions rather than in what he says. In any case, in order to establish the extent of Raymond's role as illustrator of *FLASH*, we should examine some of the evidence.

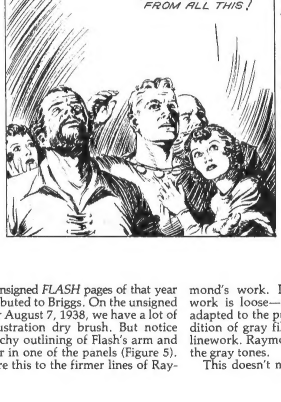
The Briggs illustration from a May 1938 *BLUE BOOK* (Figure 3) is clearly superior to the earliest *FLASH* drawings. Given only this sample (and without even considering what Briggs' work looked like in 1934), there's little doubt in my mind that Raymond imitated the styles of pulp illustrators when he began to move away from the simple outlines of the early *FLASH*. His emerging style incorporates the same kinds of gracefully lounging women and heroically-posturing men.

And the dry brush technique from which Raymond's style derives much (circa 1936-38; see Figure 4) is an undeni-



FIGURES 2 & 3 (Above: Raymond, 1/3/36; and Briggs, BLUE BOOK, May 1938)—Influenced by pulp illustrators like Briggs (among others), Raymond's style changed dramatically. As the identically posed women here suggest, Raymond imitated the gracefully posturing figures of illustrators for his women and improved his brush technique, now elaborately modeling and shading forms.

FIGURE 4 (1/31/37)—The illustrative manner soon pervaded FLASH. The spectacular brush work here is suggestive of the dry brush technique. Although Raymond used that technique occasionally, he normally kept enough ink on his brush to give his lines a liquid sheen. (Note the blending of the modeling on Dale's gown and the grass in which she stands.)



FIGURES 5 (top right) & 6 (Briggs, 8/7/38)—Briggs' style, although more than competent, is sketchier than Raymond's His outlinging lines tend to be less continuous, and his solids and shaded areas are done with a drier brush, leaving more open spots of white. His work consequently has a less polished appearance than Raymond's.

able echo of the sort of thing Briggs' illustration embodies. But newspaper comics pages are a different medium than pulp magazines, and on those pages of *FLASH* from the same year as this *BLUE BOOK* illustration, we have other evidence of Briggs' work.

The unsigned *FLASH* pages of that year are attributed to Briggs. On the unsigned page for August 7, 1938, we have a lot of pulp-illustration dry brush. But notice the sketchy outlining of Flash's arm and shoulder in one of the panels (Figure 5). Compare this to the firmer lines of Raymond's work. In comparison, Briggs' work is loose—airier, sketchier—more adapted to the pulp pages where the addition of gray fill-in tones flesh out the linework. Raymond's work doesn't need the gray tones.

This doesn't make Briggs the inferior

FIGURES 7 (left: Briggs, 8/21/38) & 8 (Raymond, 5/15/318)—Briggs' modeling of Flash's face seems more tentative, more searching, than Raymond's, in which the features are clearly delineated with solid black shadows rather than by sketchy lines that distort appearance.

artist. Loose and sketchy styles distinguished the work of Clifford McBride on *NAPOLEON* and Percy Crosby on *SKIPPY*. The point here has little to do with the relative merits of Briggs' work and Raymond's. If Raymond borrowed strategies of composition from Briggs and others and if he imitated graphic techniques, he also modified what he borrowed, adapting those methods to the conventions of newspaper comic strip graphics. He used the linear modeling of dry brush techniques but substituted an inkier brush for his rhythmically parallel lines of shading and modeling. And in place of the cross-hatched airy webs of tone, he used solid blacks or bolder lines that ran parallel rather than intersecting. As a result, Raymond's work appears more solid—his shapes more delineated and defined.

Briggs evidently felt less confident of giving his forms such clear definition, and when he tried it, the results were sometimes grotesque, out-of-step with the prevailing graphic mood of the strip. Notice Flash's uplifted face in another Briggs' panel from August 1938 (Figure 6). In modeling the chin with solids, Briggs gives Flash a double-chinned appearance. And the definition of Flash's right eye uses more detail than the strip's usual style. Briggs went too far in delineating clearly that eye; the addition of an eyelid undermines the impact of Flash's stare.

The modeling in another Briggs panel (Figure 7) seems executed with the same lack of confidence—or, rather, with the same diffidence about using solid heavier lines where Briggs' instinct may have been to use gray tones or webby cross-hatch. Compare the shading and highlighting of these two Briggs panels with a Raymond panel from May of the same year (Figure 8).

There are clearly two styles evident here. If you happen to prefer Briggs' style, then you probably would say his work improved *FLASH* (as Goulart says). If you prefer Raymond's style, you might say Briggs botched the pages he did. To some extent, then, the viewer's preference influences a judgment as to who influenced whom and with what effect. But this much is certain: there is a discernable difference between the work of the two men.

Because of that difference, it is not possible to mistake the work of one man for that of the other—at least, not in 1938, the time of these examples.

Given all of this, my estimation of *FLASH GORDON* is that Raymond was the informing genius of the artwork. His style changed dramatically, true; he was obviously imitating the pulp illustration manner (among others) after the first months of *FLASH*. If Briggs joined him about this time, Raymond doubtless profitted from the association. One might even go so far as to suppose that Briggs inked some of the earliest pages in the new style after first joining the strip. But given the differences that are apparent by 1938, it is clear to me that Raymond's hand is the one that gave the *FLASH* artwork its distinctive look. Raymond may have imitated slavishly at first (*may* have), but he evolved a style discernably different from Briggs'—a style that, in my opinion, is superior to that of Briggs and of the others Raymond may once have imitated.

Raymond's style slowly evolved through the *FLASH* years, and before he gave up his stint on the strip, he had abandoned the heavy lines akin to dry-brush for feathering and shading in favor of an elegant, continuously flowing slender line—starkly simple but luxuriously graceful in all its simplicity (Figure 10). Another influence doubtless at work—but no longer Briggs' if we compare his daily *FLASH* of the same date (Figure 11).

In all of the styles in which he rendered *FLASH*, Raymond responded to the influences he felt around him. But in his responses, he shaped a style of his own to fit his own sensibility, and the graphic accomplishment finally presented in *FLASH* is therefore Raymond's. His was the style that adapted whatever he saw and liked to the demands of Don Moore's stories and his own sense of the visual—creating thereby a world of graphic illustration and an illustrative manner that have been often imitated but seldom equalled since.

Unhappily, Moore's stories, for all

FIGURE 9 (12/6/36)—Raymond's compositions are distinguished by the almost langorous grace of his figures. Although this scene portrays a pitched battle, the figures could be dancers in a ballet as gracefully as they posture. The elegant simplicity of Raymond's later linework underscored the graceful poses in his compositions.

their ingenuity of incident, were too fast-paced to allow much time for character development. Flash, the polo player turned savior, is everything we expect in an adventurer—courageous, honest, nobly motivated, and above all resourceful. But he is nothing more.

Apart from possessing the traditional traits of a hero, Flash has no personality. His love for Dale is perfunctory: he is the hero; she, the heroine—and the customary relationship between such persons is love.

In Dale's pettish flashes of jealousy (which spark with such routine predictability), we see all the individuality that she is allowed. As Coulton Waugh says, "These lithe, sexy young people have an empty look—one feels that a cross-section would show little inside their hearts and heads."

But with Raymond's drawing, we seldom notice this short-coming. His graphics give the strip's characters such life-like appearance that we overlook the absence of individual personality in them. The beauty of his visuals seduces us into believing in the characters. It is Raymond's art that brings *FLASH GORDON* alive; his art makes the characters live in the minds of their readers.

FIGURES 10 & 11 (left to right: Raymond, 6/9/40 & Briggs, 6/8/40)—By 1940, Raymond had developed a flowing, liquid line with extraordinarily slender grace, and he had simplified his style by abandoning much of the linear shading techniques reminiscent of dry brush technique. Briggs who then began the daily FLASH, also simplified his technique. Although his lines haven't quite the slender grace of Raymond's, this panel is remarkable in evoking the Raymond touch.

Ken Brady ROCKET PILOT

in THE BOY WHO WASN'T THERE!

JETS BLASTING, KEN BRADY TAKES OFF ON A ROUTINE TEST FLIGHT... ONLY TO FIND HIS SANITY UNDERGOING THE WEIRDEST TEST OF HIS LIFE! A KIND ACT SUDDENLY TURNS INTO A STRANGE DISASTER WHEN HE FINDS HIMSELF FACING---***"THE BOY WHO WASN'T THERE!"***

© COLAN

HAVE A HEART, KEN! LET'S TAKE THE KID UP WITH US! YOU KNOW THE SHIP'S SAFE... AND WE'RE NOT MAKING AN OFFICIAL TEST FLIGHT...
WELL, I SHOULDN'T LET YOU TALK ME INTO IT... BUT I DON'T LIKE TO SEE A KID DISAPPOINTED!

ALL RIGHT, DANNY. HOP IN THE BACK AND WE'LL START BLASTING!
WOW! GEE! THANKS!

WITH AN EAR-SHATTERING ROAR, THE FLAME-FLASHING ROCKET SHIP BLASTS AWAY FROM THE EARTH...
WHEEE! HERE WE GO!

COULD YOU FLY OVER THE TOWN? ALL MY FRIENDS WILL BE WATCHING...
SURE, DANNY!

WELL, I HOPE YOUR FRIENDS WERE WATCHING FOR US, DANNY. NOW I'LL HAVE TO GAIN ELEVATION---BEFORE WE RUN SMACK INTO THAT HILL UP AHEAD!

YOU'RE NOT GOING UP, BUT--- YOU'RE GOING DOWN! THERE'S A HIDDEN LANDING FIELD AT THE FOOT OF THE HILL. PUT THE SHIP DOWN THERE---OR I'LL BLAST YOUR HEAD OFF!

TAXI THIS CRATE RIGHT INTO THAT CAVE UP AHEAD!
NICE SET-UP, DANNY! WHO'S THE MASTER MIND BEHIND ALL THIS?
THE MAN WHO HAD ME BRING YOU HERE WILL BE WITH YOU SOON!
NICE HIDEOUT! CARVED OUT OF THE INSIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN BY AN ATOMIC BLASTER!
BUT HOW DOES A NICE KID LIKE YOU FIT INTO THIS SET-UP, DANNY? WHY DID YOU BRING US HERE?
I HAD TO DO IT, KEN! I COULDN'T HELP MYSELF! DR. SNARL WILL ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS SOON...
KEN! ARE MY EYES PLAYING TRICKS ON ME? OR AM I GOING SPACE-HAPPY?
YOU SEE IT ALL RIGHT, BUZZY! DANNY IS VANISHING INTO THIN AIR!
HE'S GONE! NOTHING LEFT OF HIM... NOT EVEN A SPECK OF DUST!
HE NEVER WAS THERE IN THE FIRST PLACE!
DANNY WAS MERELY A PROJECTED ILLUSION! AND VERY USEFUL, TOO!

THIS IS MY ILLUSION-PROJECTOR! IT SENDS OUT THE EXACT IMAGE OF WHATEVER I PLACE INSIDE MY PROJECTO-CABINET!
AND WHO IS THE BOY?

HE'S THE BOY WHOSE FATHER PROMISED HIM A RIDE IN A ROCKET SHIP FOR HIS BIRTHDAY! THE STORY HAD TO BE TRUE--- AND HE DOES LIVE IN THE NEARBY TOWN!
GEE! KEN-- I DIDN'T WANT TO DO IT! I COULDN'T HELP IT!

NOW MARCH, ALL OF YOU! I HAVE THE NEW ROCKET SHIP--- WHICH IS WHAT I WAS AFTER! THERE ARE PLENTY OF GOVERNMENTS IN THIS WORLD THAT WILL BE HAPPY TO PAY ME WELL FOR IT!

AND WHAT ABOUT US?
I'M GOING TO KILL YOU, OF COURSE! YOU'VE SERVED MY PURPOSE!

NOT IF I CAN HELP IT!

WHAT... WHAT HAPPENED? KEN HAS VANISHED! AND SO HAS THE PROJECTO MACHINE!
PUFF!

THAT'S ONLY AN ILLUSION OF MOTION GAMES! THERE WAS NOTHING INSIDE THE PROJECTO-CABINET — AND YOUR FRIEND, KEN BRADY, HAS SUCCEEDED IN PROJECTING THAT!
BUT HE'S RIGHT THERE, SOMEWHERE! I'LL GET HIM!
IF I DON'T DO SOMETHING FAST, HE'S GOING TO GET ME WITH ONE OF THOSE WILD SHOTS ... OR DAMAGE THE MACHINE SO IT STOPS PROJECTING! YES, I'M HERE! COME AND GET ME!
JUST KEEP SHOOTING-... SO I'LL KNOW WHERE YOUR HAND IS!
I'LL COVER THE ENTIRE FIELD, WITH MY BLASTER! YOU CAN'T ESCAPE ME!
AH! I'VE GOT YOU, SNARL!
GRAB THE BLASTER, BUZZY, AND COVER THIS RAT! AND PULL THAT PROJECTO-CABINET OVER HERE SO IT'LL BE VISIBLE!

ANOTHER TRIP FOR YOU, DANNY. I'M GOING TO PROJECT YOU TO TOWN. BRING THE POLICE HERE!
AND DANNY... BRING ME SOME-THING TO EAT, WILL YA? I HAVEN'T HAD ANY BREAKFAST YET!

WITH ALL THIS AMAZING-SCIENCE --- YOU TURN TO SELLING OUT YOUR COUNTRY TO MAKE MONEY! WHY, ANY-ONE OF YOUR INVENTIONS COULD HAVE BROUGHT YOU MILLIONS!
THEY'RE MY INVENTIONS! I WOULDN'T SHARE THEM WITH ANYONE ELSE! THAT'S WHY I HAD TO RAISE MONEY THIS WAY!

THE POLICE ARE RIGHT OUT-SIDE! THEY'LL BE HERE IN A MINUTE. AND HERE'S BREAKFAST FOR YOU. BUZZY!
YIPPEE! I EAT!

WHAT'S GOING ON? YIPE! THE FOOD'S AN ILLUSION, TOO!
OF COURSE, BUZZY! THAT'S ONLY DANNY'S PROJECT-ED IMAGE! AN ILLUSION CAN BRING ONLY AN ILLUSION OF FOOD!

DANNY'S RIGHT HERE! HE NEVER ACTUALLY LEFT THE PROJECTED MACHINE!
MY STOMACH'S SO EMPTY I WAS SEEING AND BELIEVING IN MIRAGES! OH, WELL, LET'S ROCKET AWAY FOR HOME AND SOME REAL FOOD.

THIS TIME, DANNY, YOU'RE GOING TO GET A REAL ROCKET RIDE! YOU CERTAINLY DESERVE IT!
GEE, THANKS, KEN. I'M GOING TO HAVE A WONDERFUL BIRTHDAY PRESENT AFTER ALL!

POWERHOUSE
PEPPER
BANG!
BANG!
SCRAM VARMINTS! I'LL SLAUGHTER ANY HOMBRE WHAT AIN'T OUTA MY SIGHT BY THE TIME I COUNT TO TEN!
DAN'S DINER DUMP
BEAT IT FER COVER, EVERYBODY! IT'S RAWJAW McCLAW, THE BIG OUTLAW!
?
GARGWH!
RUN FER YORE LIFE, STRANGER, OR RAWJAW McCLAW WILL PERFORATE YORE CRAW!
LOOK! THAT SHORT GUY WHAT JUST CAME TO TOWN AIN'T A-RUNNIN' FER SHELTER!
THEN HE AIN'T GOT LONG TO LIVE, POOR FELLER!
- EIGHT - NINE - TEN!
YOU HEERD WHAT I SAID. SO HERE IT IS, BUD!
BANG!

?
AW, SHUCKS! I SHOULDA KNOWN IT WAS A CLOTHES DUMMY! NO ONE BUT A DUMMY WOULD HAVE NERVE ENOUGH TO STAY OUT IN THE OPEN WHEN I COME AROUND!
LOOK! I'M NO DUMMY, DUMMY, BUD! I RESENT YOUR BLASTING MY BEAN!
WOW! ANY HOMBRE WITH A NOGGIN THAT HARD MUST BE ALMOST AS TOUGH AS I AM!
WELL? WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT THIS?
THINK YO'RE TOUGH ENOUGH TO YELL AT ME, EH? WAL, FOLLER ME, BUD, AN' I'LL SHOW YUH HOW TOUGH I REALLY AM!
SERVICE! SERVICE! I WANT A BIG BEAKER OF BLACK BENZINE AND BOILED BRIMSTONE, WITH A SHOT OF SHINGLE STAIN, A JIGGER OF JAWS JUICE, A HUNK OF HORSE HARNESS FLOATIN' ON TOP, AN' A CHUNK OF CHIPPED CHINA FER A CHASER!

I HOPE IT'S JUST THE WAY YOU LIKE IT, MISTER McCLAW!
NOW IF YOU CAN DRINK ANYTHING STRONGER THAN MILK, THEN I'LL ADMIT YOU'RE AS TOUGH AS ME!
MAKE MINE A GLASS OF MILK!
MILK? WHAT IS MILK?
MUH?
YOU MEAN THAT STUFF THAT COMES FROM COWS?
SURE! I DRINK A COUPLE OF QUARTS OF IT EVERY DAY!
HE DRINKS IT, HE SAYS! WHO EVER HEARD OF THAT? JUST THINKING ABOUT IT MAKES ME WOOZY!
HMM, HE MUST BE ALLERGIC TO MILK!
I NEVER EVEN HEARD OF A DRINK LIKE THAT! IT MUST BE MIGHTY POWERFUL!
HE'S COLD AS A COD, SO I'D BETTER DRAG HIM OUT!
CAFE
JUST A MINUTE, LAD! I'M THE SHERIFF HERE, AN' I'LL TAKE CARE OF RANJAW McCLAW!
OKAW, SHERIFF!

YEAH? WHAT IF HE BUSTS OUT? THEN HE'LL BUMP ALL OF US OFF!
AH! THAT SHORT GUY IS THE FIRST ONE HE'LL GET!
AH! THIS LOOKS LIKE MY BIG DAY! I'LL TACKLE THAT STRANGER!
HOWDY, STRANGER! I AM J. CLAMMY SHAKER, THE HAPPY UNDERTAKER! WOULD YOU CARE TO MAKE A DOWN PAYMENT ON A BEAUTIFUL PINE BOX - JUST IN CASE McCLAW BREAKS OUT OF JAIL?
NO SALE!
AW, FUDGE! AND I JUST BOUGHT A NEW SHOVEL!
W-WHAT HAPPENED? WHERE AM I?
YO'RE IN THE HANDS OF THE LAW, McCLAW!
HAW! THAT'S A GOOD ONE! THERE AIN'T NO CLINK WHAT CAN HOLD THIS GUY!
SEE WHAT I MEAN, SHERIFF?
NOW I'M GONNA DO WHAT I CAME TO DO - CLEAN OUT THE BANK! THEN I'M GONNA TEAR THIS TOWN APART - INCLUDIN' THAT GUY WHAT SAYS HE DRINKS MILK!

DOLE OUT EVERY DIME IN THIS DUMP, OR YORE HAME IS MUD, MUDD!
?
HAW! HAW! McCLAW! THE JOKE IS ON YOU! THIS BANK WENT BROKE JUST YESTERDAY, AN' THERE'S NOTHIN' LEFT!
WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT!
WHAM!
SEE? ALL I GOT IN THERE IS MY OLD LAUNDRY!
WHAT A NAUSEATIN' DEVELOPMENT THIS IS!
NOW I'LL HAFTA GO TO ALL THE TROUBLE OF ROBBIN' SOME OTHER BANK! IT'S AWFUL THE WAY I HAFTA WORK FOR MY MONEY!
OW!
LOOK! McCLAW'S COMIN' OUT OF THE BANK, AND HE'S HEADIN' THIS WAY!
LET'S BEAT IT FOR THE HILLS!
THAT'S A DERN GOOD IDEE - BUT THERE AIN'T NO HILLS IN THESE PARTS!
DON'T GET YOUR BLOOD IN A FLOOD, MEN! MAYBE I CAN HANDLE HIM!
YORE PLUMB MAD, LAD! McCLAW WOULD CHAW YORE JAW RAW WITH ONE PAW!
GIT OFF THE STREET WHEN YUH SEE ME COMIN', YUH GAPIN' LUNKHEADS, OR I'LL WADE IN AN CRUSH EVERY CARCASS IN THE CROWD!

THIS TOWN IS SICK OF YOU! YOU'D BETTER GET OUT AND STAY OUT!
WAL, LOOK WHO'S TALKIN'! I SUPPOSE YORE GONNA PUT ME OUT, EH?
MAYBE!
LIKE FUN YOU WILL, PILL! I'M GONNA CHILL YORE BILL, I WILL!
UH!
WHOMP!
MY MY WHAT BIG OPEN SPACES YOU HAVE!
THAT'S NOT FAIR! YOU DODGED!
THEN TRY IT AGAIN, AND NEXT TIME I WON'T DODGE!
CLUNK!
OW!
ET THAT IS A LESSON TO YOU!

AND LET THIS BE ANOTHER LESSON TO YOU!
SPLAT!
YOU WILLY! YOU KNOCKED THE CIGARET OUT OF MY MUSH! THAT HASN'T HAPPENED TO ME SINCE I WAS THREE MONTHS OLD!
NOW WILL YOU GET OUT OF TOWN, OR DO YOU WANT SOME MORE?
I'M STICKIN' RIGHT HERE, AN' MOTHER! CAN MAKE ME MOVE! REMEMBER YUH CAN'T HIT A MAN WHEN HE'S DOWN!
HMM! THERE SHOULD BE SOME MANNER OF MAKING THIS MUTT MOVE!
HAW! HAW! WHY DONCHA GIVE UP! YUH MIGHT AS WELL ADMIT I GOT YUH UP A STUMP, CHAMP!
AH!
TWO TIMES LATER
HEY! WHAT'S THE IDEA OF THAT ANIMAL! I HATE COWS!
?
THAT'S WHAT I FIGURED!

I THINK YOU SHOULD TRY A LITTLE MILK IT'LL BE GOOD FOR YOU!
MILK!? HO, HO! NOT THAT! I CAN'T STAND IT!
WELL - IF YOU CAN'T STAND IT, YOU CAN LEAVE! OTHERWISE, I'M GOING TO CRAM IT DOWN YOUR CRAW, MCCLAIN!
SWISH
YIPPEE! MCCLAIN HAS SCRAMMED!
SO WHAT! HE'LL BE BACK SOME OTHER TIME!
DON'T WORRY! IF HE COMES BACK YOU CAN ALWAYS SCARE HIM AWAY WITH MILK!
STRANGER, YOU'VE SAVED OUR TOWN!
RIGHT! AS MAYOR OF THIS DUMP I HEREBY PRESENT YOU WITH THE KEY TO OUR CITY!
BUT THIS IS A PIANO KEY!
SURE! IT'S THE KEY OF C FOR CHASING OUT MCCLAIN!
HEY! I'LL BET A BUCK THAT THIS BOY IS A SECRET UNITED STATES MARSHALL!
IS THAT RIGHT, STRANGER?
ER - THAT'S RIGHT! HERE'S MY BADGE!
I KNEW IT! WHO EVER HEARD OF A WANTED CRIMINAL WITH A STRANGER THAT DIDN'T TURN OUT TO BE A G.G. MARSHALL!
FOLLOW ME FOR FURTHER PUCKER OF PENNY DRAMATICS, FRIENDS!

STRONGMAN

OF CRASH COMICS

Raymond Miller

Crash Comics No 3 1940 Tem Publ

Back in 1940 I was a strongman fan, a statement which no doubt not many people can, or would care to, make. How loyal a fan I was is something else again. Only the cover of *Crash #1* seems even dimly familiar; nothing else I've seen rings a bell.

However, that I was a fan was brought home to me sometime back in the mid or late 40s, when I found a comic with Strongman, and virtually leaped for joy with the discovery. It seemed at the time to be a more modern, better-drawn version, but as I've never come across such a book since, I'm fairly sure that my eyes played tricks with me, and it was merely one of the reprints I list in the Strongman index at the end of this article.

In 1940, there was no question in my mind that Strongman was far superior to Superman, a character who struck me as a shoulder-shrug almost from the first. Looking back three decades later, I can only guess it was because of the costume, which even now I find more interesting than the man of steel's, and because Strongman was more conventionally, well, handsome. Although since I was a rabid fan of Captain Easy, from whom Superman seemed to have borrowed a feature or two, I can't really be sure about the latter.

Strongman, the Perfect Human, began in May, 1940 in the first issue of *Crash Comics*. His editors must have thought they had something. There weren't too many Golden Age heroes who chalked up the pages per issue that Strongman did.

Art was by the same fellow all the way through, one Pagsilang Rey Isip, an anagramatized pseudonym if ever there was one, but I've never been able to unravel it. The mysterious Mr. Isip may have had sufficient reasons for disguising his name, as he was no winner as an artist. His handiwork was not so much technically bad as sketchy and uninteresting. Further, Strongman's face varied from attractive to near-grotesque, even in neighboring panels. However, he had, as I've indicated, done a nice job on the costume. Shirt, briefs and boots were blue, with cape, tights and a button-down triangle on the shirt front all yellow. Belts and epaulets were red, except on the cover of *Crash #1*, when they were a leather color, perhaps the best combination.

Strongman's origin, a brief three-panel job on the second page of *Crash #1*, consisted in simply relating that "For many years he has followed the exercises of the secret book of yogi...until he has become the world's most perfect man...But to the everyday world he is Percy Van Norton, rich man's son..."

It will come as no surprise to any Golden Age reader that Percy was a "useless playboy", but he went the rest of the golden age's useless playboys one better, sporting not only a cigarette holder, white tie and tails, but a monocle as well. The first story was credited (up front) to Scotty Walters, but no name appeared on the strip again till the last page of the last (fifth) story, when the elusive Mr. Isip finally deigned to affix his name.

Writing was no strong point of the strip, either. Take the clumsiness and misspelling of the first box in the premier story: "Strongman! He has the strength of a hundred elephants the speed of a racing car and the skin with the toughness of a rhinocerous..."

The first story is a simple tale. The pearls of one of Percy's companions are stolen at gunpoint while their party is at the "Famous Cloud Room night club". Percy slips away, becomes Strongman, "leaps down the skyscrapper with a series of gigantic bounds", chases the thieve's car, landing on its roof while it travels at 80 miles an hour. As it develops, the pearls had been stolen so that an innocent-looking ocean liner docked in the harbor can arm itself with more naval guns. The Nazi captain slays the American holdup men, as Strongman discovers the hidden guns. The Nazis temporarily stop him with live steam—"he is overcome by the heat"—but though thrown overboard lashed to an anchor, he s back on the ship in a matter of moments and destroys one of the guns as the ship pulls out of the harbor to avoid being interned. Then, at the command of its skipper, the ship is scuttled, the captain going down with

it, as the crew escapes. Strongman thereupon dives for the pearls, which are in the captain's safe, wraps his arms around the safe, squeezes, "and the safe cracks upon like a nut". In the final panels, as Percy, he returns the pearls to their owner, who scornfully assumes he'd bought them back. As she puts it, "That's about all you could do!"

In *Crash #2*, Strongman breaks through a stone wall, a la his *Crash #1* cover, as he rescues "The real President of El Matador in Central America" from assassins. A dictator, helped by, "an aggressor nation," has taken over El Matador and is plotting against the Panama Canal.The Canal was almost as popular a prop as deceptively useless playboys and was always being threatened with destruction. Strongman tells the President they'll leave for Panama the next day. For some reason, the President is thunderstruck. "But how?" he gasps. As a cook on Percy Van Norton's yacht, it turns out. After all, the guy may have been a president, but he was also a foreigner. Cook was good enough for him.

They leave for the "Swellport Yacht Club" with Percy's usual gaggle of upper-crust cronies, ostensibly for the gambling in El Matador.

When the citizens of El Matador see their President arrive, they are overcome with emotion, and begin to rebel against the dictator, but poison gas stops them and the President is captured. Obviously this is the cue for Strongman. He perhaps kicks a shark as he swims toward land (it's hard to tell) and is nearly bayoneted as he reaches the dictator's stronghold. The bayonet crumples against him upon which Strongman seizes an ancient cannon using it to smash through a steel door. He then bowls over machine gunners with cannonballs, saves the President and Percy's guests from a firing squad and pursues the fleeing dictator, catching up with him just as the dictator's boss, an aggressor general, fires a supercannon shell at a lock of the Canal, 75 miles away. Strongman diverts the shell, and then destroys the gun emplacement as the dictator and the general flee. The president is back in power and Strongman returns to the yacht, where his friends describe their ordeal and tell him, "You weren't much help to us, Percy." "Er, er, I guess I wasn't at that," he says, doing his best to avoid looking smug. A lot of action in this story, in its simple-minded way.

yacht as a wireless message is intercepted. Percy breaks the code and

A wireless message is intercepted. Percy breaks the code and discovers that Rutania, a small Balkan kingdom, is about to be invaded by "Aissur" (read it backward), "a dictatorship with millions of soldiers". Percy vows to "Stop this international crime", but first, as Strongman, intercepts a submarine's torpedo and sends it back to the sub, destroying it.

When percy and his pals arrive in Rutania, its king, Loras, receives them and tells them Aissur's crack troops are being sent over the border by dictator Nilats (read it backward). Percy, like a true playboy greets this tragic news by asking where he can buy skis, which causes his friends to mutter, "Isn't that just like Percy! A cruel war is raging and he thinks only of sport!"

Had they but known! For next we see Percy, as Strongman, skiing toward Aissuran troops, routing them, then hurling an armored car at a highway bridge, smashing it completely, thus cutting off their line of communication, leaving the battalion to be "cut to pieces by the Rutainian troops". In Aissur's capital, Wocsom (you've got the picture), the news reaches Nilats, who, for some reason, looks rather like Josef Stalin, and he has his general executed for failure. Makes no difference. Strongman is on the way, but once inside Nilats' tower, discovers *four* Nilatses. Some room for dramatic conflict here, but instead it consists of two mild panels: Strongman asking the quartet, "Which of you is Nilats" and their responding, "None of us. We're his four doubles!... The real Nilats has (sic) fled in his car!" Undaunted, Strongman commandeers a plane, sets it on automatic pilot, scoops up Nilats' car and convinces him to sign a peace treaty as the dictator and car dangle below the plane. Again, the final two panels are devoted to Percy's friends informing him that the war is over, and deploring his uselessness.

Come *Crash #4*, Percy and his guests are back aboard the yacht, leaving Rutania. They soon pick up some castaways who turn out to be "refugees from Scanlandia". This time someone named Moslav is the invader (whatever happened to the Nazis of *Crash #17*) and Strongman slips off the yacht, because, as he puts it, "this is the time for action!"

It's also the time for a whole lot more, it turns out. Previous stories had averaged about five panels to a page, but with this episode it comes closer to eight. A lot of leaping about in this story, using the tops of cars as springboards, jumping from building to building, hopping aboard a train, in fact so much so that once, when confronted with a stream, Strongman, to "conserve my energy", uproots a tree and uses it to cross, explaining, "There! I guess I get tired of jumping now and then!" He discovers Scanlandia's president, hidden in a cave, destroys a television base which has been monitering the Scanlandians and directing gunfire, flies off to the U.S. for planes for Scanlandia, flies back with the planes in one large cargo plane, scoops up Moslav as he sits astride his horse, is downed by one of Moslav's battleships, pushes "the wounded plane toward the harbor" as Moslav is accidentally shot by his own Admiral, has the plane assembled, then swims to the enemy's flagship underwater for two miles, capsizes it when it begins to shell the city in retaliation and reinstates the President after the foe is "annhilated". And finally, of course, returns to his yacht, to be put down once more as a dreamer "and nothing else."

Strongman's last story, in *Crash #5*, again contains that strand of continuity that began in *Crash #2*. It's mentioned that he's on the way to the theatre in Polaria, after having "saved the people of Scanlandia from the horrors of war". In this issue, Percy has dropped the monocle, cigarette holder and yachting cap in favor of the standard business suit and fedora, but he's still the same fake playboy of yore. Off to the theatre with his friends, he sees "sixth column" troops parachuting into Polaria, and on the excuse of needing a drink, leaves his cronies and captures the entire company of paratroops by encircling them with a "boomerang rope". He then attacks an advancing tank corps and is imprisoned in cement by a "liquid cement gun", but he expands his chest, and cracks it off as the Sixth Column

troops shout "Himmel!" (Ah! Perhaps the Nazis from *Crash #17*) Strongman then leaps atop an artillery shell that was aimed at him and rides it (in a one-panel full-page drawing) 20 miles to Polaria's commander-in-chief to inform him about the Sixth Column invasion.

After Polaria mobilizes its army, Strongman defeats an enemy attempt to destroy him with whirling buzz-saws, foils a try at a gas attack by "inflating his barrel chest to full capacity" and blows the gas back toward the enemy. There follows his deflection of the bombs of airplanes, tossing them back into enemy lines, his destruction of the entire enemy air fleet when they try to hurl inflammable acid at the Polarians, lighting it as it flies through the air so that it burns back upwards, to the planes. He finally kills some "Fifth Column" ambushers. The aggressor dictator asking to sign a non-aggression pact," heads back toward the theatre, which his friends are just leaving. It's back to the cigarette holder as they chide him for the last time as a no-account. The final panel advises, "Strongman has saved the Polarians from the vicious attack of the aggressor, but an even more thrilling adventure awaits him next month!" And with these brave but empty words, Stongman faded from sight—but not forever. Somewhere during World War II his adventures from *Crash #2* and *#5* were reprinted in a series of comics that sold for a dime, bore no date or info on publisher, contained ads only for war bonds and stamps, and always cover-featured a strip which didn't appear within the book. True, there was a Strongman comic printed in 1955 by ME, but he bore no relation, as far as I know, to the Strongman of 1940.

Crash Comics, though a second-line comic, was one of the more readable books of its day. Nine of its features lasted from issue one through number five, with Cat Man turning up in issues #4 and #5, and Bob Preston, explorer, making himself the final, 11th comic feature of *Crash #5*.

Buck Burke was an energetic jungle strip drawn, I would guess, by the artist who did The Whip in *Flash Comics*. Secret Agent Z-2 was the usual spy story, though it did sport Irwin Hasen art on at least one occasion. Solar Legion, is, I imagine, the reason that *Crash Comics* sells for the sometimes eyebrow-lifting prices it does. Jack Kirby was the artist, and though the stories aren't much, the Kirby name is apparently enough of a lure. The Blue Streak was so poorly done a superhero strip that at times it even seems to have employed swipes from the work of Larry Antoneete, an act which I'm sure knowledgeable collectors would agree is quite an indication of abysmal.

Things picked up with The Flying Trio, three flying soldiers-of-fortune who are the sole "survivors of a corps of 20 airmen fighting for the little nation of Sylvania against an invader". Again, nice vigorous art and words by Buck Burke's delineator, Jane Drake, Detective, was about as dull as it sounds, but Alec, a "funny" strip, had something going for it, even if only a confusion as to whether it was indeed funny or a serious strip about a dictator. Shangra, also drawn by Strongman's Pagsilang Rey Isip, though the story itself was attributed to Nam Chung Po, had a reasonably exotic fascination to it, set as it was in "an unknown region of Tibet."

The Cat Man, who supplanted Strongman on the final cover of *Crash*, was not the first catman in comics. That honor is claimed by Tarpe Mills' The Cat Man, a transvestite-type hero who first appeared in *Amazing Man #5* in 1939. *Crash*'s Cat Man, however,

may have had some relation to Holyoke's more famous Cat-Man, since *Crash's* publisher, TEM, apparently was a precursor or early variant of Holyoke. Also, according to Jerry Bails' Collector's Guide, David Merywether was the alter ego of Holyoke's Cat-Man, the same alter-ego sported by *Crash's* version.

In the origin story, David's scientist-father, mother and sister are attacked by "Jungle Wild Men" in India (is this possible?), with a tigress finding David, and with her "mothering instinct" carrying him off "as one of her cubs". Naturally, "through years of jungle association, David is endowed with all the faculties of the cat family, to which tigers belong." Art may have been by Bert Whitman.

Herewith, a Strongman-Crash Comix Index, compiled with the invaluable aid of Pat Iacovone, the kind of fan who makes the whole idea of fandom seem incontestably worthwhile.

CRASH #1, May 1940

Cover: Strongman smashing through brick wall.
1. Strongman-19 pages
2. Buck Burke-5
3. Secret Agent Z-2 -6
4. Solar Legion [Kirby]-5
5. Text-"Danger Dive"-2
6. The Blue Streak-5
7. The Flying Trio-4
8. Jane Drake, Detective-5
9. Alec & the Reign of Yang-3
10. Shangra-10

CRASH #2, June 1940

Cover: Strongman hand from an airplane and pulling up a car with gangsters in it.
1. Strongman-10 pages
2. Buck Burke-5
3. Secret Agent Z-2 -5
4. Solar Legion [Kirby]-5
5. The Blue Streak-5
6. Text-"Singapore Sally"-2
7. The Flying Trio-5
8. Jane Drake Detective-5
9. Alec-3
10. Shangra-10

CRASH #3, July 1940

Cover: Strongman stopping a giant torpedo.
1. Strongman-19 pages
2. Buck Burke-5
3. Secret Agent Z-2 -4
4. Solar Legion (Kirby)-6
5. Blue Streak-5
6. Text-"The Law of the Wild"-2
7. The Flying Trio-5
8. Jane Drake Detective-5
9. Alec-3
10. Shangra

CRASH #4, September 1940

Cover: Strongman hanging by his legs from steel girder holding two thugs.
1. Strongman-17 pages
2. Buck Burke-5
3. The Cat Man (Origin)-6
4. Secret Agent Z-2 -4
5. Text-"Carnival Troubled"-2
6. Flying Trio-5
7. Jane Drake Detective-4
8. Solar Legion (Kirby)-5
9. Alec-2

9. Blue Streak-6
10. Alec-2
11. Shangra-8

Crash #5, November 1940

Cover: Catman scaling wall with two light-beams coming out of his eyes and a gangster leaning out of a window with a gun in his hand.
1. Strongman-13 pages
2. Flying Trio-5
3. Cat Man-8
4. Alec-2
5. Buck Burke-5
6. Blue Streak-5
7. Jane Drake Detective-4
8. Bob Preston Explorer-4
9. Solar Legion (Kirby)-5
10. Text-"Waterfront Wildcat"-2
11. Secret Agent Z-2 -4
12. Shangra-7

***NOTE: The following are the only reprints I've discovered that contain Strongman. It's possible the Strongman stories from *Crash #1 & #3* were also reprinted in this series, but if so, they've eluded me. If anyone can tell me about any, I'd appreciate hearing from him.

BLUE STREAK #8—No date

Cover First Page of Blue Steak story
1. Buck Burke-4 (incomplete)
2. Text-"Waterfront Wildcat"-2
3. Alec-2
4. Secret Z-2 -4
5. Secret Agent Z-2 -4(This is the story whose first page is the cover of Secret Agent Z-2 #7)
6. Strongman from Crash 4-16 (one page out)

CITIZEN SMITH #8—1944

Cover: First page of Citizen Smith story
1. Strongman from Crash 5-13 pages
2. Text—"Carnival Trouble" from Crash 4-2
3. Blue Steak from Crash 4-5 (incomplete)

4. Solar Legion(Kirby) from Crash 5-5
5. Shangra from Crash 5-7

MISS VICTORY #3—1945 (No Strongman but of interest because of its reprint of the Cat Man's origin)

Cover: First page of a Miss Victory story
1. The Cat Man from Crash 4-6
2. Buck Burke from Crash 4-5
3. Flying Trio from Crash 4-5
4. Jan Drake from Crash 4-3 (incomplete)
5. Solar Legion (Kirby) Crash 4-5
6. Shangra from Crash 4-8

SECRET AGENT Z—2 #7—No date (1944 or 457)

Cover: First page of Z-2 story by Hasen
1. Strongman from Crash 2-19
2. Blue Streak from Crash 2-5
3. Jane Drake from Crash 2-5
4. Alec from Crash 2-3

Cap FURY
CAP FURY LEAVES ON A MISSION OF THE GREATEST DELICACY FOR THE NAVY DEPARTMENT AND CUTS HIS WAY THROUGH IN HIS USUAL ROUGH-SHOD, BUT NONE THE LESS SUCCESSFUL WAY. THE ENTIRE CIVILIZED WORLD GASPS AS IT AWAKENS ONE MORNING AND LEARNS WHAT THIS AMERICAN SEA DOG HAS ACCOMPLISHED.
OUR SECRETARY OF THE NAVY SENDS A HURRIED CALL FOR CAP FURY.
YOU SENT FOR ME, SECRETARY KNOX?
YES, CAP FURY, I DID. WON'T YOU BE SEATED?
IT'S ABOUT THOSE HUNDRED AMERICAN PLANES ON THAT FRENCH CARRIER IN THE MARTINIQUE. WE'VE GOT TO GET THEM SOMEHOW.
WHY DON'T YOU JUST GO AND TAKE EM, MR. KNOX?

BUT WE CAN'T DO THAT. DIPLOMATIC RELATIONSHIPS ETC. WE ARE NOT AT WAR WITH FRANCE, YOU SEE THIS IS A DELICATE MATTER.
I GET IT YOU WANT THOSE PLANES, BUT YOU MUST KNOW NOTHING ABOUT HOW YOU GET THEM. SO YOU'LL BE MORE SURPRISED THAN ANYBODY WHEN THEY SHOW UP IN THE U.S.A.
I SEE THAT YOU DO NOT LACK INSIGHT, MY DEAR CAPTAIN.
YEP, I'M VERY SENSITIVE, WHEN A HOUSE FALLS ON ME I KNOW IT. IF YOU'LL GIVE ME A FREE HAND, MR. SECRETARY, I'LL BRING THOSE PLANES HOME, SO HELP ME!
HERE IS YOUR ORDER OF FURLOUGH. YOU HAVE LABORED VERY DILIGENTLY, CAPTAIN FURY, YOU WELL DESERVE THIS AT THE HAND OF THE NAVY. AND MAY I SUGGEST THAT YOUR EVERY WISH AND ORDER WILL BE CARRIED OUT TO MAKE YOUR VACATION IN THE CARIBBEAN A GRAND SUCCESS. I WISH YOU GOD SPEED.
I WANT YOU, SIR.
WHAT AN ARTIST! WHAT AN ARTIST!
THE FABULOUSLY WEALTHY NEW AMERICAN TYCOON, MARK FURY, BOARDS HIS PALATIAL YACHT FOR A CRUISE THROUGH THE CARIBBEAN...
WE'LL CALL AT GUADALOUPE FIRST AND STAY THERE A WEEK OR SO. I'LL THROW A COUPLE OF WILD PARTIES THERE. THAT WILL THROW SUSPICION OFF THE TRACK.
I'LL CHARTER IT OUT AS YOU SAY, CAP FURY.
THE PARTY WAS SUCH A SUCCESS THAT BY THE NEXT DAY EVERY ISLAND IN THE CARIBBEAN HAD HEARD OF THIS PLAYBOY'S ANTICS.
YOU ARE SO WONDERFUL, SEÑOR FOOLRY
YOU'RE NOT SO BAD YOURSELF, BABY.

THE RICH AMERICAN'S YACHT STEAMS INTO MARTINIQUE HARBOR. THE MERCHANTS HAVE BEEN HOPING FOR THIS MOMENT EVER SINCE THEY HEARD ABOUT THE PARTY AT GUADALOUPE.
BOY, AINT SHE A HONEY!
CAP FURY CONS'DERED SUCH A
HOW ABOUT ALL YOU OFFICIALS AND ALL THE OFFICERS FROM THE FRENCH NAVAL SHIPS COMING ON BOARD MY YACHT TONIGHT, EH?
ASK WHO? YOU'RE THE GOVERNOR OF THIS SET UP AINT YOU?
ZAT EES TRUE, BUT-- ZEE WAR-- EET MAKES-- EET EES -

WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SO. YOU'VE GOT A NAZI SUPERVISOR HERE. WELL COME ALONG. LETS LOOK HIM UP. I'LL INVITE HIM TOO.
YOU HANDLE A DELICATE SITUATION VEREE WELL, MEESTAIRE FULRY.
I HAVE HEARD MUCH ABOUT YOU, MR. FULRY. IT ISS A PLEASURE I ASSURE YOU, JA?
I'M THROWING A PARTY TONIGHT FOR ALL THE OFFICIALS AND OFFICERS OF THE FRENCH FLEET, AND I HOPE THAT YOU ABOVE ALL WILL ATTEND, HERR VON MANNHEIM.
I VILL BE VERY GLAD TO COME. VERY GLAD INDEED.
THAT'S SWELL. THE SHINDIG STARTS AT EIGHT AND ENDS WHENEVER YOU FEEL YOU'VE HAD ENOUGH. SEE YOU TONIGHT, GENTLEMEN.
DID YOU NOTICE THAT NAZI NE'S YOUR SPITTIN IMAGE.
YEP, HE HAS A PAN ALMOST AS HARD AS MINE. THAT MAY COME IN HANDY, WHO KNOWS?
WELCOME GENTLEMEN. WELCOME!
YOU ZEE, LIKE I SAY, HERE I AM - JA?
THEN WHAT ARE WE WAITIN' FOR? WHOOPEE! STRIKE UP THE BAND!

MOVE OVER TO THE AIRPLANE CARRIER, CAPTAIN, BUT DO IT SLOWLY, SO THEY DONT GET WISE.
LATER, ON THE CAPTAINS BRIDGE-
WE'RE ON ONE OF THE FINEST AND FASTEST YACHTS IN THE WORLD, SO WHY STAND STILL? I MOVE WE TAKE A LITTLE MOONLIGHT SAIL, JUST AROUND THE HARBOR. MIND YOU.
HUZZAH! ZAT EES GOOD!
WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF MR FULRY
I'VE LE FULRY VIVE!
WOULD YOU BE GOOD ENOUGH TO COME TO MY LABIN A MOMENT, HERR VON MANNHEIM, I HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU.
JAWOHL, GLADLY WILL I COME MIT.
NOW THE SHOWS OVER TAKE OFF YOUR CLOTHES I'M TAKING OVER YOUR JOB.
YOU HAVE HAD TOO MUCH TO DRINK JA?
I AIN'T GOT TIME TO EDUCATE YOU SO I'LL MERELY IMPRESS YOU. HERE'S A STARTER!
AAAAGH!
SPLAT

YOU TINK YOU ARE SCHMART, JA? I STUDIED PRIZE FIGHTING MIT SCHMELING YET.
YOU DON'T SAY WELL I STUDIED IT WITH--
ACH DU LIEBER!
-- JOE LOUIS.
BAM
HOW DO YOU WEAR THIS PEEPER WINDOW? I'LL HAVE TO GLUE THE PESKY THING TO MY EYE TO KEEP IT ON.
RIGHT, CAP FURY. YOU LOOK SO MUCH LIKE MANNHEIM
WHERE ISS DE CAPTAIN DONNERWETTER, EH?
ON THE BRIDGE OF THE CARRIER-
HOW SOON CAN VE ZAIL, VAT?
AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE, SIR WE HAVE HAD STEAM FOR THE PAST TWO WEEKS
THEN FULL STEAM AHEAD, I
ORDERS LATER, WHEN VE ARE ON DER HIGH ZEAS. IT ISS DE VILL OFF DER FUEHRER.
YOUR ORDERS SHALL BE CARRIED OUT TO THE LETTER, SIR.

I HAVE COME FOR THE SAILING ORDERS, HERR VON--BUT WHAT IS THIS? WHO ARE YOU?
I'M THE GUY WHAT'S TAKIN' THIS LITTLE FISHIN' SMACK OVER FROM NOW ON. IF YOU PLAY BALL WITH ME I'LL GIVE YOU NOTHIN' BUT KINDNESS. IF YOU DON'T I'LL GIVE YOU THE LETTER I JUST DROPPED FROM MY ASSUMED NAME.
A NAZI SUBMARINE, SIR. IT IS ON THE SURFACE AND HAS SIGNALED US.
BOY, WHAT A CHANCE, WHAT A CHANCE! COME ALONG, FROGGY, AND SEE THAT THERE'S FAIR PLAY.
AHOY THERE! WHAT ARE YOU DOING ON THE HIGH SEAS?
WHAT'S IT TO YOU, SQUARE HEAD?
WHAT, YOU FRENCH INGRATE, YOU DARE TO INSULT US? WHY I'LL---
WITH THE VERY BEST WISHES OF THE GOOD OLE U.S.A.

WE'RE TAKIN' THIS CARRIER TO THE U.S.A. AND WHY SHOULD THAT BOTHER YOU? AINT THE FRENCH AND THE AMERICAN'S ALWAYS BEEN FRIENDS? DIDN'T WE COME OVER AND FIGHT TO SAVE YOUR COUNTRY IN 1917? IF YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR YE WE'LL SAVE YOU FROM THE NAZI HEEL THIS TIME TOO.
BUT IF THERE'S ANY ONE OF YE THAT DON'T AGREE WITH MY TAKIN' YOUR SHIP TO AMERICA, I'VE GOT ABOUT TWO HUNDRED CARTRIDGES ON ME, AN' IF YOU'RE DOUBTFUL ABOUT MY GETTING THE BEST OUT OF 'EM JUST WATCH THIS.
CAP FURY IS A DEAD SHOT
WE WILL GO TO AMERICA WITH YOU, CAP FURY
SWELL! AND YOU'LL NEVER REGRET IT, I PROMISE YOU THAT.
ALL THE WHISTLES IN NEW YORK HARBOR ARE BLASTING A HEARTY WELCOME TO THE AIRPLANE CARRIER.
WONDERFUL, MY BOY. ABSOLUTELY WONDERFUL! BUT WE SAID NOTHING ABOUT THE AIRPLANE CARRIER
WELL SEEIN' AS HOW FRANCE OWES US SOME THREE BILLION, SUPPOSIN' WE KEEP THIS MUD SCOW AND CREDIT 'EM, SAY A BUCK AND A HALF ON THEIR BILL
DON'T MISS THE NEXT ISSUE OF DOC SAVAGE COMICS WHEN YOUR FAVORITE SEA CHARACTER, CAP FURY WILL AGAIN THRILL YOU WITH HIS HAIR-RAISING, NERVE TINGLING ADVENTURES. CAP'LL BE WATCHIN' FROM THE BRIDGE FOR YE - - -

A MLJ PUBLICATION

PART 2

COMICS

By Raymond Miller

Also appearing in *Pep #1* were The Queen of Diamonds with The Rocket which was shortened to The Rocket, from #2-12. This was a Flash Gordon type strip by Lin Streeter which found a huge rocket ship crashing within the barriers of the Diamond Empire. The pilot, known as The Rocket, had become a friend of the Empire's lovely Queen. The stories were even close to that of Flash Gordon's adventures complete with a City of Hawkmen in #4. By #11 The Rocket and The Queen of Diamonds had built a large wooden schooner with the help of the Pigiodgeons—a race of Lilliputians, and set out for new adventures on the ship which they called the Rocketeer. The stories then became more like Eisner's Hawk strip.

An oriental strip along the lines of Charlie Chan, appeared in issues #1-11. Fu Chang, International Detective and Chinese Scholar, was educated in America and was the heir to the Magic Chessmen of Aladdin, with whose aid he combated the forces of evil and oppression. He had organized the Ti Yan Tong as a Secret Society, along with his fiance Tay Ming, to fight Princess Ling Foy and her evil creations. Lin Streeter drew many of the stories.

Kayo Ward by Phil Sturm and Bob Wood was a prize-fighting strip that appeared in #1-28. Also in #1-16 was Lee Sampson, The Midshipman. This was *Pep's* answer to *Top-Notch's* Keith Kornell.

A Green Hornet-type hero called The Press Guardian appeared in #1-11. This is one of those oddities of the comic book industry. Starting in #1 the strip is called The Press Guardian but in the story the character wears a costume, has no secret identity and was called The Falcon. Then in #2 he is The Press Guardian and wears a green business suit and red mask. He was really playboy Perry Chase, son of the publisher of The Daily Express. In secret Perry becomes The Press Guardian, foe of all enemies of the Press. In issue #3 Perry rescued Cynthia Blake from the Moroniabund and she becomes his assistant and the only one, besides his valet, who knew his secret. The stories were drawn by Mort Meskin and weren't bad at all—especially the earlier stories when Meskin used a fine line effect.

Bentley of Scotland Yard was MLJ's longest running detective strip starting in #1 and running through #41 August 1943. Inspector Bentley was featured in some very weird and off beat adventures like battling The Hunchback in #4, "The Riddle of the Whirring Wings" in 11 or "The Case of the Armless Corpses" in #23 and a murderer known as Mr. X in #29. Most stories before #19 were drawn by Sam Cooper while most after #19 were by Paul Reinman.

Perhaps one of Bentley's most puzzling cases was in #31's "The Church Steeple Murders". The story opened with Bentley spotting the body of a man on the top of the church steeple. With the help of the church sexton and his brother Dr. Tagg, Bentley removed the body from the steeple and discovered that it was Jim Crivet's butler and he had been clubbed to death. Soon Bentley, along with the sexton, Dr. Tagg, Jim Crivet and Crivet's wife, Anne, was examining the belfry. He bent over the rail to examine a clue just as the great bells began to ring knocking him over the rail. Desperately he grabbed and hung onto the bell and was almost impaled on top of the sharp point of the steeple which he discovered could be raised and lowered lower than the bell, which explained how the butler got there...he was knocked onto the steeple by the bells, then the steeple was raised. Part of the mystery was solved, but who was the murderer? The reader had all the clues and Bentley asked the reader if he could now identify the killer. And if the reader were as smart as Bentley. As it turned out, the killer was Anne Crivet who was a bigamist. She was married to both Crivet and the butler and one had to go. So for once the butler didn't do it, he was the one done in.

Debuting in *Pep #1*, was one of MLJ's better early superheroes, "The Most Astounding Man on the Face of The Earth", better known as The Comet. The main thing The Comet had going for him was the art of Jack Cole. The stories Cole did were great but he didn't stay with the strip long enough to make it as popular as other MLJ characters. After #6, he was replaced by Bob Wood in #9 and 10 and by Lin Streeter in #11-16.

John Dickering, a young chemist, had discovered a light gas which he injected into his blood stream. It made it possible for him to leap thru the air in great leaps a'la Superman although The Comet looked more like he was flying then just jumping. Dickering also found that the gas had settled in his eyes and that he was able to throw off a powerful disintegrating ray that only glass would stop. Since the ray would not pass through glass he wore goggles to prevent the ray from destroying anything. To use the ray he simply raised the glass goggles and poof, he would destroy whatever he pleased.

In *Pep #2* The Comet saved Florida

from a villain who called himself Satan. In issue #3 Satan and his assistant Doc Zadar captured The Comet and using hypnotism, forced him to become a criminal. He went about destroying things and killing many policemen. Then in an argument with Satan, Doc Zadar turned The Comet on Satan and he killed him. After killing Satan, The Comet returned to Zadar but, accidently, he had left his visor up and the rays from his eyes struck Zadar, killing him. The Comet then came to himself, read in the newspapers what he had done and vowed to clear himself, which he never completely did.

In #5 The Comet met Thelma Gordon for the first time. Thelma was a reporter who believed he was innocent and wanted his story. In #6 while trying to plan a way to clear him, The Comet went out and then returned in regular dress and said to Thelma: "How's this for a disguise? Nobody knows me as plain John Dickering." This was the first mention of her knowing his identity.

He never really cleared himself. Although Thelma's stories always played him up as hero, he was always regarded as a criminal-at-large by the police. While the stories after #7 tend to deal with his fight against crime, rather than running from the police and trying to clear himself, each time he met up with the police they went after him. Even at the start of the story in #17 when he delivered Big Boy Malone's mob to the police he leaves in a hurry in a hail of police bullets. He then returned to Thelma who pleads with him to give up and become plain John Dickering as he has atoned for accidentally killing police. He says no, his conscience would never allow him and he must go on making amends. He then returned to his own apartment and as he was changing clothes, his brother Bob walked in and discovered his secret.

A few days later, two thugs, friends of Big Boy Malone, laid in wait for John but way-laid Bob by mistake and as they tried to force him into their car, The Comet flashed onto the scene. Turning toward the intruding Comet, the thugs opened fire and The Comet went down in a hail of bullets. Before the police arrived, Bob was able to get him to Thelma's apartment. The Comet was dying. His last words to Bob and Thelma were: "My turn now-You two stick together-Kind of a memorial to me-Good bye Boby-Bye Thel—Aahh!"

Bob swore, "I'll carry on for him Thel! I'll bring his murderers to the hangman. I'll be their Hangman!" And he was.

This was a first for comics. No one actually killed off a superhero but MLJ proved it not only could be done, but the character that replaced him was far more popular than The Comet ever was.

Then Hangman made his debut in *Pep #17* July 1941. The origin story was written by Cliff Campbell and the art was by George Storm. Storm was okay on humor strips, but his art on a serious strip like The Hangman was not only atrocious but about the worst of any MLJ hero. Storm remained on the strip thru *#19* and one would wonder why the strip clicked, but it did and became another MLJ instant hit.

If it wasn't bad enough that The Comet was a wanted man, The Hangman almost met the same fate. In *Pep #18*, a master criminal called The Jackal decided to get rid of The Hangman by posing as him. His plan was to hang some innocent people and place the blame on the real Hangman. Not many heroes ever had anyone out to ruin their career in such a short time. The Jackal started to plan his downfall in the third panel of the second page. But The real Hangman finally caught the fake one and thanks to Thelma Gordon, her newspaper cleared him. No two heroes ever had the same loyal girl in their corner like John and Bob Dickering had in Thelma Gordon.

By *Pep #23* the art had improved. By now both Bobby King and Harry Lucey were doing the art. Now the stories were written by Bill Woolfolk. Then came issue #28 June 1942 and for the first time in his career, The Shield did not appear on the cover of *Pep*. Instead the cover featured only The Hangman and a costumed villain known as Captain Swastika and inside for the first time, The Shield gave up the lead spot as well to the Hangman. On the inside front cover, on The Shield G-Man Club page, The Shield announced that he and Dusty were playing second fiddle to The Hangman this issue. Dusty agreed. He was fighting Captain Swastika and this was the greatest issue of *Pep* yet. Captain Swastika was back in #29 to steal a U.S. Battleship. In a fight Captain Swastika proved he could defeat The Hangman in hand-to-hand combat and he did it every time they met. At the end of the story in #29, Swastika is almost killed when he accidentally hung himself in a noose he had rigged to trap The Hangman. In #30 The Hangman met up with a weird witch-like character called Mother Goose. All her crimes were commited using nursery rhymes as clues. The story had a weird night setting complete with a castle, an old windmill, an old well (which almost became The Hangman's grave) and eerie goings on. In #31 The Hangman journeyed to Germany to fight a Nazi called The Hunter.

Issue #31 or 32 was Harry Lucey's last. The art in #33 was by John Cassone and with #34 Bob "Fuji" Fujitani would become the artist for most, if not all, the remaining Hangman stories. In the first Fujitani drawn story, Captain Swastika returned. He was supposed to have been killed of in *Hangman #3* but in *Pep #34* he told The Hangman "it is not so easy to kill a man of my strength." Again the Hangman was no match for Swastika and in the end Swastika was killed by his own henchmen with an icepick meant for The Hangman. He stumbled in front of The Hangman and took the icepick in his back.

In issue #32 The Hangman appeared once again in the lead story, "The Bullfrog Strikes Again". The Hangman would appear on all covers from #17-42 except for #41. He and The Shield may just as well have been missing from the cover of #42 since Archie and Jughead had the spotlight. Both The Shield and The Hangman were colored dark blue on the cover and at first glance one almost missed them.

With *Pep #47* March 1944 in a story called "The Noose", The Hangman's career finally came to an end. Since #41, The Hangman's stories had been reduced to only 9 pages after having appeared in 13 page stories since #28. For the most part his stories had been

averaging 1-2 pages more per issue then The Shield's stories.

In *Pep #48* May 1944 The Hangman was replaced by The Black Hood. (The Hood had already replaced The Hangman in his own book in the Fall of 1943). By now all of MLJ's heroes were running out of steam and it seemed that all the heroes left, from The Shield on down and including The Black Hood, were drawn by Clem Harrison. The Black Hood had just finished his run in *Top-Notch Laugh #44* April 1944 and moved to *Pep* the following month. But unlike his previous long run he would last only four issues (to #51 December 1944) in *Pep*. In 1946 he would return for two more issues #59 December 1946 and #60 March 1947, but these were after he gave up the Black Hood costume. By now, only The Shield was left and he would vanish after five more issues.

Next to the Shield, the longest running strip in the old *Pep* was Sergeant Boyle. As mentioned in the *Blue Ribbon* chapter, Charles Biro did a character called Corp. Collins and his sidekick Slapsie, infantrymen in the U.S. Army. Not to be out done, Biro introduced almost a carbon copy of Collins and Slapsie in *Pep*, called them Serg. Boyle and Twerp, put them in the British Armed Forces and had an even bigger hit than Collins was. Before long Boyle and Twerp were popping up all over the globe fighting the Japanese and Germans for the USA. Just what part of the service they represented was not really clear. They were more-or-less happy-go-lucky trouble-shooters. Many stories teamed them up with Collins and Slapsie. Both writer Harry Shorten and artist Carl Hubbell were written into the story in #31. Boyle remembers that he had forgotten to send in that month's story to the MLJ offices where they find Shorten and Hubbell trying to think up a story without much luck. After a meeting between the four, Boyle and Twerp decide they could work up a story better alone so they go out and round up some Nazis.

The stories were played for laughs and there was a lot of fun in them. Biro did the stories through #10 while Hubbell did the rest through #39, which was the last Boyle story in *Pep*.

A minor super-hero made his debut in *Pep #12* February 1941. Ted Tyler, a young fireman, had entered a burning laboratory which was fired by a pyro-maniac known as The Bug. Inside the building, The Bug had knocked out Tyler and tied him in the lab. While tied up, a chemical spilled all over him and he came out of the fire alive. Later he found out that his body was now able to absorb fire. Bullets would melt when they hit him. He then added a blue costume, called himself The Fireball and went about destroying The Bug. His costume was brief for a super-hero, in that his legs were bare and he wore no mask. His costume was blue with a yellow belt and wrist bands. The art was by Paul Reinman. The Fireball appeared last in #20 October 1941.

In issue #16 June 1941 through #21, November 1941, one would find a somewhat offbeat strip in the form of Madam Satan. Madam Satan was the Devil's ally and she was sent to Earth to do his bidding. A beautiful girl named Tyra was going to marry a young man but his parents disapproved of the idea so she poisoned them and put them in their car and caused it to crash into their son's car. After pulling them out of the wreck, the son discovered that his father was still alive and he told him what Tyra had done. Returning to Tyra, he killed her, but she was so beautiful, even in death, that he just had to kiss her. As it turned out, hers was the kiss of death and he died. Her evil spirit was then drawn to Satan and he returned her to earth to do his evil work as Madam Satan. The artist on most stories was Bob King.

Believe in fairy tales? *Pep* had one in a wonderful fantasy strip called "Danny in Wonderland" which started in *Pep #12* and was last seen in #39. As it happened in #12, Danny was visiting his Uncle's ranch and one night he was reading a book called "Stories of the

Land of Wonder" and he wishes that he was there. A fairy then appeared and told him if he really wished it, to go outside. Outside, he and his dog Snapper were caught in a tornado which carried them to Wonderland a'la Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. In Wonderland, Danny met the dwarf Kupkake (Kuppie) and the two and Danny's dog had all kinds of adventures. In #23 they meet the Mad Hatter and in #29 everyone in Wonderland celebrated Danny's birthday by showing flashbacks of his adventures since he arrived in Wonderland. In #30 he saved Alice from the land of Nightmares. In #31 the story took on a sad turn of events. While Danny and Kuppie were swimming they were attacked by an alligator which killed Snapper when he tried to save them. All through the forest the trees and animals cried, when suddenly Mother Nature appeared and told Danny that Father Time could restore Snapper but he may not be easy to find. Through the Fiery Caverns and the Cave of Monsters they went until finally they reached their objective, the mountan of Father Time. But they learn that he is unable to help them because he was some 500 years behind his schedule and didn't have the time. One place called Sleepy Town was almost 1,000 years behind time—they even used square wheels. But he agreed to help get Snapper back if Danny and Kuppie would go to Sleepy Town and bring them up to date. All turned out well and other adventures followed. Many stories were drawn by "Red" Holmdale during 1942.

With *Pep #30*, MLJ produced what would be their last attempt at a major costumed hero when they introduced Captain Commando and the Boy Soldiers, a strip that would outlast all their costumed heroes except the Shield and The Black Hood. In fact, he outlasted all but The Shield in *Pep Comics*.

The first three stories had beautiful art by Alex Blub and it was some of the best he ever did. But after #33, under others the art became just run of the mill fare and when Irv Novick finally took over it had become almost a copy of DC's Boy Commandos strip.

"This is a tale of four average boys—like you or you, or you—somewhere in England. Although they come from many lands, they are united in their love of freedom! And their hero is freedom's foremost champion, the world reknown fighter against tyranny CAPTAIN COMMANDO". Thus read the splash page of #30. The four boys were Billy Grayson, American; Gerald Sykes, English; Armard De Latour, free French; and Erik Jansen from Norway. The boys hoped to join up with the Commandos but Billy's Dad didn't believe in fighting, or so he let on. Billy thought he was a coward but in fact, he was really Captain Commando himself.

When the boys tried to join the Commandos they were refused because of their age but were told they could use Erik, the Norwegian boy, for a guide. Putting on uniforms, Erik helps the other three boys slip on board the ship which was also the same ship Captain Commando was on on a mission to Norway to free prisoners and when Captain Commando went to see them he saw his son. He couldn't meet them as Captain Commando because his son might recognize him. He finally faced them as Billy's father. Again he gives Billy a lecture against fighting and a broken-hearted Billy is about to give up. After the mission into Norway where Captain Commando and the Boy Soldiers fought side by side, Captain Commando stood alone on the deck when Billy asked if he could speak to him. Captain Commando says, "I'm pretty busy" to which Billy replied, "Too busy to even talk to me, DAD." The secret was out and Billy was now proud of his father, and Captain Commando and the Boy Soldiers became a team.

The art was even better in #31 but by #33 other artists took over and the strip really suffered. The relations between father and son was gone and although the art did improve with #34 the stories just didn't seem serious enough without Blum's art.

There was nothing new in Captain Commando and The Boy Soldiers. It had been done many times before with strips like Captain Freedom and the Young Defenders, Daredevil and the Little Wise Guys, Guardian and the Newsboy Legion and Rip Carter and the Boy Commandos. Within a few issues Irv Novick took over the art and brought a vast improvement, except for the fact Novick chose to follow Simon & Kirby's Boy Commandos as a pattern. The Germans now looked like they had stepped right out of a Boy Commandos story and to make things worse, Gerald and Erik were replaced by Percy and an almost exact copy of the Boy Commandos Brooklyn in Flatbush, complete with red hair. After Novick left, the stories became no more than fillers, a far cry from the first three stories. But as bad as the strip became, it did manage to reach #56 March 1946 before it was finally dropped. In all Captain Commano was in #30-52 and #54 and 56.

Other short lived strips in *Pep* were Lucky Larson in #13-15 and Jolly Roger in #21-27. This latter strip was drawn by Ed Smalle and featured Jolly Roger and his Sky Pirates. Issue #28 had Wings Johnson who had been in *Top Notch #1-27*, but his appearance in *Pep* was just a one shot.

While *Pep* outlasted both *Top-Notch* (as a serious comic) and *Blue Ribbon*, it was also written in the cards that changes were due here as well. With #40 July 1943 the first change came. Long running strips Sarg Boyle and Danny in Wonderland were replaced with humor strips Catfish Joe and Little Chief Bugaboo. Catfish Joe was another Li'l Abner type drawn by Larry Harris while Little Chief Bugaboo related the comic adventures of a little Indian boy and his dog Fido. Joe would last be seen in #48 while Bugaboo vanished after #47. With #42 September 1943 a take off on Marco Polo, called Marco Loco, was introduced and ran through #52. With #53 June, 1945 the reader would find this line-up: Archie, Shield and from the old *Top-Notch Laugh* Susie, Twiddles and Pokey Oakey. Captain commando was back for #54 but the lineup for the years to come was pretty well set up with Archie, Katy Keene, Twiddles, Gloomy Gus and Li'l Jinx. *Pep* had run its course and MLJ was now officially dead as far as the superhero was concerned. *Pep* would last into the 80s with Archie and his gang.

JAN.
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NO. 1
WINTER ISSUE
SPECTACULAR HIT OF PEP Comics

The PIEFACE PRINCE of PRETZLEBURG
by George Carlson
IT WAS A BIG DAY IN OLD PRETZLEBURG
WAS REVIEWING THE GRAND ANNUAL WEEKLY PARADE OF THE RENAL HAT-BAND WHEN TO HIS HORROR HE DISCOVERED THAT THESE BIG BAGS DRUM WAS MISSING!
NO DRUM! NO BOOM! NO DOMPH! NO SOMMITE!
ALL PRETZLEBURG SEARCHED HIGH AND LOW
EVEN LIBERAL REWARDS
FOR PRETZLEBURG
EVEN I CAN'T FIND IT— AND THAT'S BAD!
WILL HERE'S WHERE I GO UP IN MY BOOM! IN KARAT BALLOON— I'LL GET A BIRDS EYE OF THE WHOLE TRIAL
WAS IN VAIN FOR THE BIG DRUM WAS COMPLETELY GONE
DISPATCH THE PIE-FACE PRINCE TO FIND THAT DRUM AND FIND IT SOON

AS THE PRINCE WAS ABOUT TO STEP INTO HIS 10 CENT BALLOON A STRANGER RUSHED IN
BOSS - HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO BUY A CHEAP FREE TICKET
THAT ALMOST MOMENT PRINCESS PAPIRTELLA MURPHY WAS WASHING THE NINETY FIRST FLOOR WINDOW IN HER LEFT FOOTED UNCLE'S SECOND-BEST CASTLE.

A SPECK IN THE SKY COMES NEARER TO THE LEFT-FOOTED UNCLE'S CASTLE JUST AS THE PRINCESS STARTED TO DROP OUT ON HER JOB — WELL - THE PRINCE JUST CAME IN TIME. — THAT'S ALL!
HOW ABOUT A LITTLE ANCHORIDE?
POSH!
WHERE HAVE I SEEN YOU BEFORE?
OH!!!
SUDDENLY - A GENUINE PERUVIAN NIGHT-ALK, OUT ON HIS NIGHTLY ROUND, TAKES A PECK AT THE BALLOON AND SO ENDS THE BALLOON, BUT NOT THE PRINCE AND THE PRINCESS,
HAWR! HAWR! JUST THE THING FOR MY RUBBER COLLECTION!
A BIT OVER THE SPEED LIMIT, I'M AFRAID!
WITHOUT BALLOON, ROPE OR ANCHOR TO BOTHER WITH, THE PRINCE AND HIS FAIR FRIEND FIND THEMSELVES HEADING FOR THE COURTYARD OF THE CASTLE OWNED BY THE RAGING RAJAH!
DOWN
WE DON'T GET MUCH TIME TO ADMIRE THE VIEW
CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

A CONVENIENT SMALLISH TOWER STOPPED THE PRINCE - (ALMOST)
BOOM!
THE PRINCESS LANDED IN THE FOUNTAIN POOL WITH NOT ONLY A SPLASH BUT ALSO A BOOM.
NOT SO WELL BUILT-
- WHAT YOU WOULD CALL A SCRAPPY LANDING
HELP! FIRE! POLICE!
THE CASTLE GUARDS GOT RIGHT ON THE JOB..
I'M NOT STOPPIN' TO ASK QUESTIONS-!
THE PRETZLEBURG
LUCKILY A WELL-BOUND JOLLY-CAR CAME ALONG AT THAT VERY MOMENT (LUCKY FOR THE PRINCE)
WHEN DO YOU GET TO PRETZLEBURG?
I DUNNO! I'M LOST ANYWAY!
OKAY THEN-! I'LL BUY TH' CAR FROM YAH! HERE'S 69¢ CASH- I WANNA GET HOME!
YOHSON YAHTOU
AND THE PRINCE NOT ONLY BECAME PASSENGER, BUT ITS
CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

HE NEW OWNER-DRIVER OF THE PRETZLEBURG JOLLY-CAR, THE PIE-FACE PRINCE, THEN QUICKLY HEADED IT IN ANOTHER DIRECTION..
NOW WE'LL GO PLACES!
NEXT FLOP, PLEASE!
PRETZLEBURGER
AY TANK AY GO HOME
FOR THE PRINCESS,— SHE LANDED SAFELY, BUT OH SO WET!
HERE'S WHERE I CRASH TH' GATE!
HE PRINCE AND HIS JOLLY-CAR SPED STRAIGHT TO THE RAJAH'S CASTLE FROM WHICH CAME AN OLD FAMILIAR SOUND-
A GOOD BEATING IS WHAT YOU NEED AFTER BEING IN THAT POOL SO LONG!
STRANGE SIGHT GREETED THE PRINCE AS HE CRASHED INTO THE COURTYARD—
THE DRUM! THE DRUM I WAS HIDING IN THE POOL! WOW!
THE RAJAH HIMSELF MISSED ABOUT FORTY-TWO OUT OF HIS USUAL FORTY WINKS OF SLEEP.

NO. 17
PEP COMICS
ACTION DETECTIV ADVENTURE
JULY
HERE HE IS FELLOWS, THE HANGMAN!
BOY, IS HE A GREAT GUY! LOOK FOR HI INSIDE!!
COMICS' NEWEST SENSATION
THE HANGMA